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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 001667

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CLASSIFICATION MISMATCH)

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: JORDAN'S INTERIOR MINISTER DEFENDS CITIZENSHIP  
REVOCATION FOR PALESTINIAN-ORIGIN CITIZENS

REF: A. AMMAN 1520  
[1](#)B. AMMAN 516  
[1](#)C. 08 AMMAN 1466

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Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Jordan's Interior Minister Nayef Al-Qadi has changed his public stance on the practice of citizenship revocation for Palestinian-origin Jordanians. While he denied the existence of such a policy as recently as June 24, Qadi is now vigorously defending it in domestic and regional media outlets. Qadi explained that Jordan will revoke the Jordanian national identity numbers of Palestinians who fail to renew their status as citizens of the West Bank. He justified the policy by claiming that it was a reaction to similar Israeli revocations of Palestinian identity documents designed to force citizens of the West Bank to claim Jordan as their homeland. Contacts say that the policy is directly related to hard-line Israeli government statements on Jerusalem and peace negotiations. Government officials are intent on opposing Israel's recent political moves, failing to fully appreciate the human cost and domestic political implications of the policy. End Summary.

#### The Practice of Citizenship Revocation

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[1](#)2. (S) Under fire from regional and domestic media, Jordan's Interior Minister has recently attempted to explain and defend the ministry's practice of revoking citizenship from Palestinian-origin Jordanians. The debate centers on the system of colored cards which allow Palestinian-origin Jordanians from the post-1967 era to claim the privileges of Jordanian citizenship. The system was developed after Jordan's unilateral disengagement from the West Bank in [1](#)1988. Holders of yellow cards are deemed to be full-time residents of Jordan and are given national identity numbers that entitle them to full access to government services. Green cards are issued to residents of the West Bank. While they are issued full validity passports of convenience, green card holders have no national numbers, and are only granted limited access to government services. They must also obtain a work permit to be legally employed in Jordan. (Note: See Ref C for a detailed rundown of the cards and their significance. See also "Levels of Jordanian Citizenship" on Intellipedia-S for an explanatory chart. End Note.)

[1](#)3. (S) During the last decade, the Ministry of Interior embarked on a low-key policy of downgrading Palestinian-origin Jordanians from yellow card to green card status for those whom the Ministry considers to be legal residents of the West Bank, effectively revoking their citizenship by taking away national identity numbers. There has never been an official regulation or public statement

about the criteria for determining residency, let alone a political debate about why the practice of citizenship revocation exists.

Denial

14. (S) Up until mid-July, Qadi denied any knowledge of citizenship revocation despite widespread allegations within the Palestinian community that the practice was ongoing. In mid-June, former Interior Minister Rajai Dajani (who came up with the colored card system in 1988) gave a speech in Amman claiming that the policy of citizenship revocation was illegal and unnecessarily divisive (Ref A). In a June 24 interview with a Jordanian newspaper, Qadi defended the ministry's practices, saying that "there has been no withdrawal of citizenship from any citizen...I challenge anyone to say that the Interior Ministry has withdrawn his Jordanian citizenship."

Acknowledgment And Justification

15. (S) Qadi met with members of the Lower House on July 15 to defend the ministry, providing statistics which show that thousands more Palestinians gained citizenship through the "correction" of their status over the past three years than lost it. MPs we spoke to remain skeptical of Qadi's data and motivations, however. An MP from a heavily Palestinian district told us that he is constantly being asked by constituents to help fight the revocation of their citizenship, adding that three of his own relatives have had their yellow cards taken away recently. He believes, as many of our contacts do, that the anecdotal evidence of the problem's scale flatly contradicts Qadi's official statistics.

16. (S) In a July 19 interview with London-based newspaper

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Al-Hayat, Qadi explained the process of citizenship revocation and the political reasoning behind it. Citizenship of Palestinian-origin Jordanians will be downgraded if they do not apply for "family reunification permits" for themselves and/or their children in the West Bank. This bureaucratic act maintains the ability of Palestinians currently residing in Jordan to claim citizenship in a future Palestinian state. Qadi explained that Jordanian authorities revoke the national identity numbers of Palestinian-origin citizens until they can demonstrate that they and their children have obtained "family reunification permits" in the West Bank. Qadi said that the Interior Ministry "freezes national numbers in order to motivate (Palestinian-origin Jordanians) to consolidate their right to Palestine." Qadi claimed that once "family reunification permits" are presented to the authorities the ministry restores national identity numbers. (Note: Qadi provided no evidence to suggest that any national identity numbers have actually been restored. End Note.)

17. (S) Qadi went further in a July 21 Al-Jazeera interview, explaining that the ultimate goal of citizenship revocation is to encourage Palestinians to leave Jordan and resettle in the West Bank. He said: "Eventually, the goal is to force our Palestinian brothers to try again to go back to the West Bank to stay there and to obtain an Israeli approval and permit to stay and live in the West Bank...We are trying to stand fast and prevent Israel from emptying the West Bank of its Palestinian citizens."

18. (S) Qadi is no longer denying the practice of citizenship revocation. Instead, he is vigorously defending the policy as a necessary check on what he sees as an Israeli plan to gradually vacate the West Bank of Palestinians. Qadi now says that coercing Palestinian-origin Jordanians to maintain their official links with the West Bank helps to counter the so-called "Jordanian option," in which Jordan would become

the de facto Palestinian state. Ironically, Qadi is chiding Israel for attempting to export its Palestinians while the ultimate goal of citizenship revocation is to do the same thing to Palestinians in Jordan. In Qadi's formulation, however, Jordan is benevolently aiding the Palestinians and gently reminding them of their duty towards their own country. "We are correcting a wrong situation, and explaining to everyone his real identity," Qadi said in the Al-Hayat interview.

"Sometimes You Have To Show A Little Fang"

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¶9. (S) Official contacts are drawing a direct correlation between Qadi's willingness to talk publicly about the ministry's policies on the Palestinian citizenship issue and the hard-line stance of Israel's government towards settlements and peace negotiations. An MFA contact said that recent Israeli government statements on Jerusalem in particular demanded a retaliatory response from Jordan. "Sometimes you have to show a little fang," he added. Contacts see Qadi's stance as a needed sign that Jordan is ready to play hardball with Israel to stress that Jordan will never allow itself to become an "alternative homeland" for Palestinians.

Comment

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¶10. (S) When confronted with the fear and uncertainty in the Palestinian community that results from citizenship revocation, contacts attempt to explain that the blame lies on Israel for creating the refugee problem in the first place. There is little appreciation (or even acknowledgment) in Jordanian officialdom of the human cost that results from this policy. Another blind spot comes in the domestic implications of citizenship revocation. East Banker political elites are so focused on scoring a political point against Israel that they ignore the real impact on citizenship revocation on domestic stability. Jordan's majority Palestinian population is increasingly concerned that nationalist rhetoric about the "right of return" is widening the social and political gap between them and East Bankers who control the government. With its economy shaky, Jordan can hardly afford a foreign policy move that creates divisions at home.

¶11. (S) Several of our contacts predicted at the time of his appointment that Qadi harbored anti-Palestinian sentiments (Ref B). Some even predicted that he would act on the citizenship issue directly on behalf of his tribal East Banker constituency. Their predictions are now being born out through a policy that, while cloaked in the rhetoric of the Palestinian cause, only serves to strengthen the political position of Jordan's minority East Bankers.

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